

FACES OF FAMILY CENTERS

Laurie Sprague



Imagine living without a warm bed, a bathroom with running water or a working kitchen. Having a place to call home is something that many of us tend to take for granted. Laurie Sprague never thought she'd become one of the millions of Americans who are homeless. After all, despite living with severe anxiety

and panic disorders, Laurie held down a full-time job, secured a modest apartment and led a normal life. But two years ago, everything Laurie worked so hard for began to unravel.

While visiting her mother at a Stamford assisted living facility, an elevator grate came loose and crashed down on Laurie's head. The accident left her with severe nerve damage and several bulging discs in her back and neck. Laurie's recovery was long and painful, and the extensive injuries kept her out of work for more than a year. Despite collecting unemployment benefits, Laurie soon found the financial stress of not having a steady paycheck too much to bear. Monthly expenses became harder and harder to meet, and eventually Laurie had to leave her apartment.

For a while, Laurie crashed on any couch she could find. But when she began to feel like a burden on her family and friends, Laurie swallowed her pride and entered the

local homeless shelter. She said the eight months she spent there wasn't ideal, but the experience made her determined to get her life back on track. Laurie began seeing a social worker to help her cope with increasing bouts of anxiety. During one session, her therapist suggested Family Centers might help her find a new home. Laurie and a Housing Resource Program staff member outlined her housing goals, and talked about the various steps she could take to live a more independent life. Within a few weeks, the Housing Resource Program found Laurie a two-bedroom apartment a few blocks from the beach in Stamford. Because Laurie was living on a fixed income, Family Centers worked with the landlord to secure a lower rent and awarded her a loan to cover the apartment's security deposit. The Housing Resource Program even furnished Laurie's new place with a couch and gave her some groceries.

Even though Laurie has a roof over her head again, she continues to lean on the support of the Housing Resource Program. She recently obtained a job at a local supermarket, and works with Family Centers on her budgeting skills and financial planning. Laurie is also planning to go back to school, and feels her future is brighter than it's ever been.

"Being homeless was mortifying," she said. "I found myself in a hole that I couldn't get out of. The support I received from Family Centers not only gave me a place to live, but also the confidence I needed keep moving forward. I have my life back now, and I owe it all to Family Centers."